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A Thread of Knots: Jacques Derrida's Homage to Emmanuel Levinas' Ethical Reminder

by Miriam Bankovsky

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He will have obligated (*il aura obligé*) [1](#)

The metaphor of the knotted thread is not a mere metaphor in Derrida's homage to the work of Emmanuel Levinas. His own essay, *At this very moment in this work here I am*, is itself structured as a thread of textual knots. [2](#) In this paper, I will ask three questions of this work in order to understand how Derrida's work works to theorize the loop, the circle that loses its way, and why looping is, for Derrida, an ethical practice. First of all, what is Derrida's aim, in threading this work of knots, or, in other words, what is the intended end of his work? How does Derrida work to achieve this aim, or, in other words, how does he tie his knots? Finally, to what extent is Derrida's intended and final end achieved in this work of knots, or, in other words, why is it that Derrida's work succeeds only inasmuch as he *fails* to fulfill his intention of paying homage?

In exploring these questions, I will reveal how, in effect, Derrida's work functions as a theorization, in practice, of the deconstructive way of loop-ular working; namely, the attempt to elude the eternal return of the same, or, in this work, the valiant attempt not to give to Levinas a work which simply repeats that which Levinas has already given to us in his own work. The re-tied thread functions along similar lines to that of a loop: the doubling of a portion of string so as to leave an aperture between the

parts through which another line can be passed thus allowing a loop-link functioning. [3](#) The thread of knots and the loop-link chain as models of working may be contrasted, respectively, with the pure, un-knotted thread or the logo-centric movement of the circle whose end is also its starting point. Derrida wants to say that, inasmuch as both the thread of knots and the loop-link chain reconfigure themselves as they progress temporally, each provide an access to difference. For Derrida, the temporal emergence of difference within the work is, in effect, the trace of a more primordial and forgotten phenomenological experience the experience of pure difference that Levinas wants to say doesn't enter into that common time of clocks that makes the rendezvous possible. [4](#) To open onto the experience of pure difference is, for Derrida, to approach the ethical. We will see that, in order to approach ethical, the work will need to continually re-work the configuration of its boundaries, and, consequently, its signification, as time progresses. [5](#)

I.

We find an answer to the question of the aim or intended *end* of Derrida's work both in the more general motivation of the collection for which Derrida's article was originally written, and, more specifically, in the question that haunts Derrida's essay. In its French original, Derrida's work comprises part of an edited collection of essays, *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas*, or, in other words, texts written for Emmanuel Levinas, devoted to him by those who knew and loved Levinas and his work. [6](#) Moreover, throughout the work, Derrida continually reflects on the daunting obligation to respond both gratefully and adequately to the pervasive ethical imperative of Levinas's oeuvre, namely, to open the door of the ego to the Other. In fact, Derrida's entire essay constitutes a reflection on the phrase He will have obligated (*il aura obligé*), a phrase taken from one of Levinas's own works in reference to the primordial obligation of the self to respond to the Other. [7](#) In Derrida's work, the Other who will have obligated Derrida's response, the He to whom

Derrida is responding is, in fact, Emmanuel Levinas.

It appears, then, that Derrida intends to celebrate, in a spirit of gratefulness, the work of Levinas. In other words, Derrida's work has a precise and determined end, namely, to give thanks to Levinas for the ethical reminder explicit in his work: to open one's door to the Other. The difficulty of this task, however, engenders a certain way of working: the loop-ular form of the thread of knots.

II.

In responding to the question of how Derrida goes about giving his thanks to Levinas in the work, we need to reflect, first of all, on the nature of the particular difficulty Derrida faces, and secondly, how he attempts to overcome this difficulty by choosing a particular method of threading his work and of tying his knots.

In line with many of Derrida's other works, the difficulty emerges in the form of a paradox which, in this case, is specific to his task of thanking Levinas. Derrida wishes to gratefully celebrate two aspects of Levinas's work. He prizes Levinas's reminder that the ethical work is that of the Saying rather than the Said. By the Saying, Levinas means that when one finds oneself face to face with another (the primordial phenomenological experience), the encounter is not captured in that which can be Said of it using the language of ontology and of constative description.⁸ Rather, the encounter is experienced as a strange and traumatic *exposure* of oneself to the unknown Other, a Saying or giving of oneself to the Other, *without* the possibility of the Other being simply returned to something able to be Said.⁹ On the front cover of a eulogy written by Derrida for Levinas on the event of Levinas's death, there appears a picture of a white room whose door is opened outwards.¹⁰ Significantly, the picture is taken from inside the white room, from a point where one can glimpse something through the open door. Similarly, the ethical relation of the self to the other is that of an opening of oneself (a Saying of oneself) to the Other in a gesture that

welcomes the unknown Other's absolute alterity. The ethical relation is not a relation of knowledge whereby the Other can be reduced to something known and Said. The latter kind of relation might have been represented, say, by a picture of the other person standing inside the white room of myself, a room which has no door at all and in which I would discover the Other as identical with myself. In this last image, Levinas and Derrida would say that this other is not the Other of which they are speaking, because this other is nothing Other than me. The room is white, because, for Levinas, Greek philosophy is a philosophy of white light, where light illumines the visible, and where the visible is thought in terms of Being to be grasped, comprehended, and thematized as the object of knowledge.¹¹ Or, to use another metaphor used in Greek philosophy in conjunction with that of white light, knowledge of the Other (which, I repeat, is not the ethical relation) might be represented by the economy of the circle whose circle is also conceived as a spot-light, in which I can be taught nothing more than what I can already see, within this spot, within my gaze.¹² Derrida particularly enjoys the Levinasian reminder that the ethical work, the Saying or giving of oneself to the Other, is something that escapes from the *circle of restitution* of the rendezvous.¹³ In other words, the meeting—the primordial experience in which the self encounters the other—cannot be returned (restituted) to the self, as if to a rightful owner, for comprehension.

Moreover, Derrida appreciates Levinas's privileged mode of working: the continual interruption of the finitude of his own work.¹⁴ At first, it appears that even Levinas, despite his intentions, will not be able to avoid describing the elusive ethical relation in terms of the Said, as an object of knowledge. As such, it appears that Levinas himself cannot avoid failing in the ethical task. However, Derrida points out that the very way in which Levinas writes disrupts the inevitability of his own textual Said with a Saying via the use of ambiguity and ambivalence. In other words, Levinas's description of the encounter (the Said) twists away from what it earlier appeared to

say such that the Said appears inadequate to the strange experience of the Other. This irreducible inadequacy, for Derrida, constitutes an openness (the Saying) or, put differently, a gesture towards that which cannot be Said. Consequently, Derrida thinks that, in Levinas's work, the Saying is knotted into the pure thread of the Said. Comprehension is no longer assured because the text is both Said and Saying: the text appears neither frank nor transparent but rather, suggestive. Thus, it is also Levinas's method of working that Derrida wants to gratefully celebrate, a method whereby the text is not easily reduced to comprehension as if to a rightful owner.

[15](#)

It is here that the paradox emerges. If Derrida was to give thanks to Levinas by commemorating his work and re-affirming its value, then he would no longer celebrate the ethical structure that Levinas sets to work. Imagine that, instead of writing his thread of knots, Derrida had simply said, Levinas's work comprises an account of the eternal obligation of the ethical imperative, namely, be open to the Other. For this valuable account, I return to Levinas my thanks. First of all, Derrida would be assuming that he had understood Levinas's account completely and correctly, thereby betraying the idea that any text (Levinas's included) is inadequate to the phenomenal experience of the Other. Moreover, simple celebration simply repeats, returning (restituting) to Levinas that which is his, no longer being open to the Other of Levinas's own text. In other words, Derrida would be betraying the Levinasian idea that every text must fail in some way inasmuch as its Said betrays the Saying. Additionally, in returning thanks to Levinas in exchange for the account of the imperative, Derrida would have, in effect, remained within the economic circle of giving and returning, thereby annulling any further obligation on his part. The scores would have been leveled. However, such reciprocity would betray the idea that the Levinasian imperative requires an eternal obligation outside of the economic circle. Thus, if Derrida's homage to Levinas is to be ethical, he must somehow create a work of thanks which celebrates the value of Levinas's ethical imperative without at the same

time betraying it, in the aforementioned ways, by this thanks. To return to the contrast made at the start of the paper between the loop and the circle, simple celebration would work according to the logic of the circle: an eternal return of the Same whose starting point is also its end which, following Levinas's account, would not be ethical. Clearly, this is not what Derrida wants to do.

Given this difficulty, Derrida undertakes to write a faulty text: he repeats his thanks in various ways which, on each repetition, fail in some way. Using again my earlier metaphor, the circle that loses its way is, for Derrida, an ethical practice. He shows, first, that it is only if the giving of thanks is faulty, if there remains *ingratitude* on his part, that the ethical Saying can be maintained. Without ingratitude, if the giving of thanks were faultless, it would simply celebrate the Said of Levinas's text, affronting Levinas's idea that the ethical relation is beyond knowledge by claiming, in fact, to know and like Levinas's work. Thus, Derrida works to give wrongly his thanks to Levinas so as to avoid betraying the ethical structure of Levinas's work. In the paragraphs that follow, we will see that the faulty work is structured as a thread, severed by its faults and re-tied such that its line becomes a chain of knots.

If we consider the temporal moment of this event obliging Derrida's giving of thanks (that is, if we ask the question *when* is it, in fact, that this event will have occurred?), we can see why Derrida names this event of obligation (the event in which He will have obligated) a strange event: in fact, at the moment of its being Said, the event of the encounter with the Other who obligates me (that which Levinas would call the Saying) will have already passed.¹⁶ This strange event underwrites Derrida's entire attempt to thank. On one hand, that he will have obligated is the condition for the possibility of giving at all, inasmuch as thanking is positioned as a response: Derrida is obligated by the strange event. As we will see, however, the inability to place this event in which he will have obligated makes the giving always faulty inasmuch as Derrida's thanks appears continually misdirected.

Derrida's failure to give to Levinas his thanks (which emerge as knots in the pure thread, and loop-linkings in a movement beyond the circle) takes at least three forms: misdirection of thanks, ungrateful giving of thanks, and the returning of thanks in the form of return of property, neither of which can be said to properly constitute a pure giving of thanks to Levinas. First, the work *misdirects* thanks, it fails write straight, no longer delivering thanks straight to Levinas. [17](#) Misdirection occurs because the event that obligates the response is no longer present at the moment in which thanks is given. A question arises (with implications for the work's place within time): when, exactly, is this moment in which the obligation will have been located? This strange future anterior the will have cannot be easily reduced to a clearly designated moment. In fact, this is why Derrida wants to say that the inability to reduce the future anterior to a designated event indicates a problem of language more generally. Where we commonly conceive language to capture something (Being) in the word, we see that the future anterior remains irreducible to this economy. That the future anterior does not capture a designated event is expressed by Derrida's comments that it designates within language that which remains most irreducible to the economy of) the dominant interpretation of language. [18](#) In this sense, Derrida's thanks are misdirected because the moment of obligation in which he owes his thanks cannot be clearly located.

A further and most interesting misdirection occurs: if we are loyal to Levinas's work, we can no longer be sure *whom* this *He* is who will have obligated. In this context, the *He* in *He will have obligated* seems to refer clearly to Levinas, the one to whom Derrida renders his thanks. However, within Derrida's context, that of Levinas's work and the precise end of giving thanks, grateful celebration of Levinas's own work engenders a strange effect: given what Levinas's work says of the ethical work (or, as Derrida calls it, the *Work*), the *He*, by implication, no longer clearly refers to Levinas. Derrida needs only to cite Levinas to produce this slippage, recalling that

Levinas tells us that the referent of the pronoun He or Il in French remains obscured, the Other of Being¹⁹ However, although concealed, the enigma is not a general neutrality. Capitalizing his Il Levinas elevates this unknown to the level of a proper name; a name naming something specific, by which he means a non-neutral, unique, singular, anonymity. In standing in for the name, the pronoun recalls this elusive anonymity (he, she, it), and yet, as capitalized, it recalls a unique, specific difference. In Levinas's language, Il refers to the specific and enigmatic Other who founds the ethical relation, constituting the first act of obligation: to respond. So when Derrida celebrates and copies Levinas's work faithfully, we cannot be sure that his gift of thanks, delivered to the Il or He in the He will have obligated, is actually Levinas. This is why Derrida writes that the event he will have obligated will have precisely defied within language this power of formalization.²⁰ The problem: the target cannot be formalized within language, and thus, in directing the gift to an Il, always already past, the gift is misdirected if intended for Levinas.

By way of reminder at this point, Derrida wants to produce the faulty gift in order respond ethically to what Levinas has said about ethics. If Derrida's work of thanks is to approach and welcome the Other (the ethical relation), he must be very careful neither to repeat what Levinas has already said of the ethical relation (for this would be to stay within the circle of the Same), nor to render simple thanks to Levinas (for this would be to remain within the reciprocal economy of gift-return). Rather, in order that the thanks be ethical, Derrida must show both how Levinas's text fails, and how Derrida's own text fails to return thanks. By committing the above faults, Derrida hopes to offer a work of thanks which remains ethical inasmuch as it moves beyond the circle of simple thanking.

Derrida's second faulty thanks is the failure to give thanks at all. In a sense, he says Thanks, but which is more like a polite kind of refusal. *Ungratefully*, Derrida finds fault,

pointing out that even Levinas cannot avoid his own Said whose nature, moreover, must be considered unethical. When read by Derrida, the fecund exposure of self to other in the Saying is consistently presented by Levinas as analogous to the relation of a father (as self), with his son (as Other), inasmuch as the relation is one of proximity *and* difference. Ungraciously, Derrida wonders, how can one mark as masculine the very thing said to be anterior or even foreign to sexual difference? [21](#) He draws out another Other of Levinas's work, that of *she, elle* inasmuch as the enigma who will have obligated might well have been a woman. In doing so, he quotes the discourse of Catherine Chalièr, critical of the place of woman and the feminine in Levinas's work who notices that the difficulty confronting him [Levinas] of using the Greek site in order to make a thought which comes from elsewhere be understood, is not perhaps foreign to a certain mutism of the feminine. [22](#) If Derrida were to offer simple thanks, the Said of Levinas's own text would be reiterated again. Through careful criticism Derrida hopes to open Levinas's text to its own Other. In this sense, Derrida's gift, his work, is ungratefully critical of Levinas's work for the sake of Levinasian ethics. [23](#)

Curiously, the final fault is that which Derrida hoped to avoid by writing the faulty text: in returning thanks, he, in effect, returns property to Levinas and no longer gives a gift of thanks. This point is fairly complex. In committing fault, Derrida wants to avoid returning to Levinas that which is already his because this would constitute the return of the Same represented by the circle whose line ends where it begins. Instead, Derrida hoped that, in knotting the thread or, in creating a chain of loops to inscribe the new into the work, he could work ethically, like Levinas, and thereby avoid remaining within the circle of the Same. However, the problem is that this very mode of writing is already Levinas: when Levinas writes, he wants to disrupt his Said by exposure to the Other in the Saying. Thus, in Derrida's writing of the faulty text the text by which Derrida hoped to sever himself from the Said of Levinas's work, to avoid returning property Derrida, despite his good intentions, fails to be

ethical by writing *in full accord* with that which Levinas says of the ethical Work. For it is the fault which is ethical for Levinas, the fault as the severing of the work's coherency by exposure to the Other. Derrida sees this problem as a trap. Beyond any possible restitution, there would be need for my gesture to operate without debt, in absolute ingratitude. The trap is that I then pay homage, the only possible homage, to his work, to what his work says of the Work. [24](#)In other words, at the very moment when we think that Derrida might, finally, have succeeded in writing as Levinas thinks ethical writing should write (which is to say, ensuring that each repetition of thanks fails to conform to the normal model of thanking), Derrida in fact fails again by *copying* Levinas's own method of faulting.

III.

We find ourselves approaching the final question that I wanted to ask of Derrida's thread of knots. To what extent, then, does Derrida actually achieve his end? Is Derrida's work, in fact, a gift of thanks to Levinas? The answer is both yes and no. Derrida is aware that, in spite of his good intentions and conscientious work, his work cannot achieve its determined end of giving thanks in any simple manner. The point to be emphasized is, however, that *the different modes of failure are not equivalent*. In other words, certain ways of failing are better than others.

We find an explanation, of sorts, in the phrase most recently quoted. It is worth repeating again. Beyond any possible restitution, says Derrida, there would be need for my gesture to operate without debt, in absolute ingratitude. *The trap is that I then pay homage, the only possible homage*, to his work, to what his work says of the Work. [25](#) The first thing to notice is that Derrida's various failures in giving thanks in fact constitute, together, the successful giving of thanks. This is because absolute ingratitude prevents the possibility of mere restitution within the economic circle of exchange. In so doing, Derrida gives to Levinas the only kind of work that

Levinas thinks is ethical: the work with faults, the thread of knots. This success, however, is a *trap* because, despite all his effort not to do so, Derrida ends up simply repeating Levinas's own ethical method of working which, as simple restitution, is no longer ethical, nor indeed a gift. Thus, the second thing to note is that, although whatever method Derrida chooses will fail to attain his end, the more complex manner of failing (his thread of knots) is *the only possible homage*. In other words, although the ethical work also fails to give thanks, it remains the best of the unsuccessful alternatives. Speaking in metaphors again, the thread of knots is better than the pure thread and the circle that loses its way (the loop-link chain) is better than the circle.

First of all, the most obvious manner of thanking, giving thanks by simply and obviously praising Levinas's work, assumes a fully determined context and instantiates what Derrida calls a dominant interpretation.²⁶ Within a determined context, the giving of thanks might easily be Said and clearly understood as such, for example, I, Derrida, deliver thanks to He Levinas for his work. However, the inevitability of fault resides in acknowledging the indeterminacy of context in a given temporal moment.²⁷ On Levinas's account, the dominant interpretation is *more faulty* because it forgets the very forgotten experience that underwrites it (the face-to-face) by forcibly closing its context and by dogmatically claiming utter success in the moment of thanking.

Moreover, although more sensitive to the indeterminacy of context, it would be naïve to think, with conviction, that consciously faulting in order to give thanks, in a roundabout way, constitutes successful thanks, for such a strategy copies, in practice, that which Levinas work says of the work.

Finally, Derrida prefers the admission that he cannot but fail, but that, in committing the fault, the Said does not simply remain the same. The faulty text complicates our understanding of the work, severing, momentarily, the dominant interpretation, and remembering momentarily

the forgotten Other. The important point to draw from all this is that this admission of failure does not engender resignation to failure but rather, *incentive* to undertake the ethical Work. For Levinas, as for Derrida, the forgotten ground namely, the phenomenological encounter with the other in the face-to-face, an encounter irreducible to the Said which uses the language of ontology, Being, finitude, closure is that which drives all ethical work, be it the work of Derrida's giving thanks to Levinas, art as art-work and a working, culture as a work progressing in time, and politics as a work which more or less works but can never fully work for all *and* their others.

IV.

In the space that remains, I would like to draw out, more explicitly, the theoretical implications of Derrida's ethics of working of knotting the thread and of looping a chain for the configuration of the boundaries of the work in time. It has already emerged that such implications are inseparable from ethical considerations because the ethical work is driven to seek the forgotten primordial phenomenological experience of the Other's irreducible singularity. As Levinas explains, this experience is lost in the temporal moment of comprehension, knowledge, thematization and judgment. The strange Relation to the Other that the ethical Work seeks doesn't enter into that common time of clocks that makes the rendezvous possible. It is derangement. [28](#)The ethical work (the thread of knots) seems, for Derrida, more capable of leaving a trace of this forgotten experience within the work itself. All this has already been explored.

As concerns the implication of looping for the configuration of the work's limits in time, as opposed to the work where the gift of thanks is simply Said (Thanks), we find some clues in that which Derrida says of the work in its three senses. [29](#)First, we have work correlating with the French word *ouvrage*: a construct or product of work such as a book, a painting, a gift of thanks or even, a decision. One could say that *ouvrage*

names the final result (completed at a moment in time) of the activity of a writer, artist, or politician, for example. We have, also, work, *asuvre*: both, work as creation (*création*) in similarity to *ouvrage* and work as activity (*travail*). As activity, the work takes time. Finally, we have the ethical Work (*ŷuvre*, capitalized) of which we have been speaking: the work of looping and of knotting. The ethical Work is work in both senses: as activity and product. As *travail* (the activity of working in time) the ethical Work seeks to re-discover, as if one could, the always already lost primordial phenomenological experience of the face-to-face (an encounter which is not within our time, but, strangely, will have been). The ethical Work as *création* (created construct) takes form as a trace of the lost encounter. Using Levinas's vocabulary, we would say that *ŷuvre* is the trace of the Saying in the Said. Using Derrida's vocabulary, we would say that *ŷuvre* is knotted into the thread of the work. The emergence of the trace, then, is an emergence of difference in time. We can see, then, that the implications of the ethical Work (as *ŷuvre*) involves a morphing of the work as it progresses temporally inasmuch as it accepts within itself the trace of the Other such that it no longer remains the Same. [30](#)Quoting Derrida, at this point, will give us a feel of how he refers to the Work in his work.

The Work, such as it is at work, *wrought*, in the work of Emmanuel Levinas) does not return from the origin to the Same. Elsewhere he writes: That is its dislocation: the work) re-marks in each atom of the Said, a marking effraction of the Saying, a Saying no longer a present infinitive, but already a past of the trace, a performance (of the) wholly other. [31](#)

Morphing and dislocation, then, are the key words that might be said to describe the effects, in time, of the loop-ular ethical Work in the work. The configuration of boundaries of the work, then, must themselves morph, as time progresses, to accept, somehow, within itself the trace of the Other. By playing the game of essence, that beyond [the beyond of verbalization] leaves a chain of traces) yet without allowing itself to be included, rather *deforming the curvature of its natural edges [bords]*. [32](#)In

other words, as each new Work (or knot, or link) is added, the work's structure morphs, the curvature of its edges or boundaries are deformed: it no longer returns, simply, to the Same.

Moreover, though boundaries will be modified in this way, morphing cannot be so disruptive as to constitute something utterly different because then it would no longer comprise part of the Work. Even the moment of revolution must retain a line of continuity with its people's particular history in order to count as a change within history. The chain of loop-links is, after all, one chain. We are reminded, here, of a recurring idea present in Derrida's earlier work: the idea of iterability where iteration names the recognition that every repetition is an alteration, where alteration is differing *without changing into something else*. The Work could not succeed (and I quote this earlier work) if its formulation did not repeat a coded or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a citation.³³ In other words, if Derrida's work of giving thanks is to constitute some kind of successful giving of thanks, it must, nevertheless conform to a certain model of thanking, whilst remaining (for the sake of ethics) irreducible to this model. Again, difference requires temporal progression for its emergence because a citation is only a citation inasmuch as it cites an existing model, a model that already exists in time. Although Derrida would say that every usage of a sign, word, image or work etc. are themselves repetitions *and* alterations to the extent that they conform to an iterable model and are comprehended in new and future contexts, the limitations of what we have heard him call the dominant interpretation are the very boundaries that he hopes the Work will morph, in time. ³⁴

In completing this paper, I will return to the metaphor of the knotted thread referred to at the outset. Quoting Derrida, The metaphor of the *retied thread (fil renoué)* belongs to a very singular fabric, a relation (this

time in the sense of a *récit*, a narrative, a relation of the same which resumes [*reprend*] the interruption of the Relation to the Other within its knots) by which the philosophical *logos* reappropriates itself, resumes into its web the history of all its ruptures. ³⁵ The morphing occurs as the emergence, in time, of a trace of pure difference a trace of the extra-temporal relation within the work. The circle, whose starting point is also its end, cannot include within itself this encounter. On the other hand, the thread of knots or the chain of loops has the capacity, in Derrida's view, to contain within itself the trace, at least, of the Other, by opening itself, via repetition as alteration (or by thanking and failing), onto this strange encounter, this beyond of Being, engendering a reconfiguration, in time, of the dimensions of the work. No one can doubt that Derrida's own work has continually reconfigured itself in the attempt to give thanks to Levinas.

Miriam Bankovsky is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. Her doctoral thesis puts the work of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas into dialogue with that of John Rawls on the subject of justice. She can be reached at miriam.bankovsky@unsw.edu.au.

1. Jacques Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, trans. Ruben Berezdivin in *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, 11 (London: Athlone, 1991). ↑
2. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 11-48. This work is the second of four major works in which Derrida's deals with the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Notably, *At This Very Moment* is one of the forgotten works of Derrida's oeuvre with next to no secondary commentary on the text. To the best of my knowledge, the only such commentary currently in existence is the reading of Simon Critchley. See Simon Critchley *Bois Derrida's Final word on Levinas* in *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, 162-189 (London: Athlone, 1991). ↑
3. *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. John A. Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2004). ↑

4. Levinas in Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 13 ↑
5. In Critchley's aforementioned reading, the central focus is on the ethical implications of Derrida's work. Drawing on Levinas's role within the phenomenological tradition, my reading will differ in attempting to draw out the theoretical implications of Derrida's way of working (his thread of knots or loop-linking) for the configuration, in time, of the boundaries of loop-ular works more generally, although the inseparability of such implications from ethical considerations will also emerge. ↑
6. Derrida, *En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici*, in *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas*, ed. François Laruelle, 21-60 (Paris: Jean-Michel Place Éditeur, 1980). ↑
7. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 11 ↑
8. Levinas presents himself as the first phenomenologist for whom the primordial phenomenological experience—the face-to-face—is not presented in ontological terms. In other words, though the face-to-face cannot be described in terms of a thought of Being (ontology), it nonetheless remains a phenomenological experience. In his idea that ontology is a dogmatism, he opposes Martin Heidegger. See Levinas, *Metaphysics precedes Ontology*, in *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, 42-48 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). ↑
9. Although present in the preface of *Totality and Infinity*, (the book which made Levinas most recognized in the English speaking world), the distinction between the Saying as the ethical relation with the Other before and beyond ontology, and the Said as the ontological thematization of the relation, thought in terms of being, gains its most clear rendition in a follow-up book, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). See particularly *The Said and the Saying*, 5-8 ↑
10. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997). Cover illustration: Jean-Daniel Bouvard, *Door-frame*. ↑
11. In opposing his primordial phenomenological event to that of phenomenology traditionally conceived, Levinas writes, [traditional] phenomenology—the comprehension effected through a bringing to light does not constitute the ultimate event of being itself, *Totality and Infinity*, 28. For a discussion of Levinas's views on Greek philosophy as problematically founded on the metaphor of light, see Derrida's first major reading of Levinas. Jacques Derrida, *Violence and Metaphysics*, in *Writing and*

Difference, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 79-154. ↑

12. This resistance to the circle such that I am no longer at home in myself is why Levinas is against both the Socratic idea of maieutics where attaining knowledge is via becoming conscious of ideas previously latent in the mind, and, moreover, the Kantian Enlightenment idea of the subject endowed with a priori faculties to which knowledge is subject if it is to claim objective reality. ↑
13. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 13, my emphasis. ↑
14. Levinas wants to contrast finitude (Being, ontology, the Said) with the primordial experience that cannot be contained by thought (the thought of infinity, transcendence, absolute alterity, the Saying, metaphysics as ethics). The contrast is not between one and its opposite, as one might oppose Being with non-Being. Rather, he recalls an experience beyond the opposition itself, which exists without being subject to Being. This idea is captured in the title of his book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. ↑
15. In *Violence and Metaphysics* Derrida reads Levinas's reminder as Jewish and messianic, one that interrupts the pure, self-referential logos of Greek philosophy. Such a reading finds support in Levinas's Jewish writings where he links the ethical self-Other relation to the relation with the Jew. He points to a similar reminder in the writings of the Talmud and the Torah and in the practice of Judaism as a religion rather than a nationalism. For example, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Zionisms*, trans. Roland Lack, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1989) 267-289, or Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990). ↑
16. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 11. ↑
17. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 15. ↑
18. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 37. ↑
19. The He will have obligated translates the French phrase Il aura obligé where the il is not merely he but the more neutral it. For example, Illeity lies outside) the thematization of objects. A neologism formed with il (he)) it indicates a way of concerning me without entering into conjunction with me. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 12. ↑
20. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 12. ↑
21. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 40. ↑
22. Catherine Chalié, *L'alliance avec Nature (La nuit surveillée)*, (Paris: Le Cerf, 1989) 97. The translation of Chalié's sentences in Derrida's work is provided

- by Ruben Berezdivin. ↑
23. It is beyond the scope of this essay to assess the validity or utility of this criticism. However, those who are interested in the issue of the problematic status of the feminine in Levinas's work could begin with the collection entitled *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas (Re-reading the Canon)* ed. Tina Chanter, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). For more of Derrida's thoughts on the status of the feminine in Levinas's work see Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 21-45. ↑
 24. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 13. ↑
 25. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 13, my emphasis. ↑
 26. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 37. ↑
 27. For more on Derrida's account of the irreducibility of context see Jacques Derrida *Signature, Event, Context* in *Margins of Philosophy* trans. Alan Bass, (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 207-330. ↑
 28. Levinas in Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 13. ↑
 29. The three senses of work are not so clearly rendered in the English translation of the text. It is necessary to consult the French original. ↑
 30. The French presentation of this phrase might assist in making sense of my description of the differences between *ouvrage*, *uvre*, and *luvre*. L'uvre, telle qu'elle est à l'uvre, uvrée, dans l'uvre d'E.L) ne revient pas à l'origine au Même. Jacques Derrida *En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici* 50. ↑
 31. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 38. ↑
 32. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 18, my emphasis. ↑
 33. Derrida, *Signature, Event, Context*, 32. ↑
 34. See Derrida, *Afterward: Towards an Ethics of Discussion*, in *Limited Inc.* trans. Samuel Weber and J. Mehlman, 111-160, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988). Where John Austin describes performative utterances as parasitic, Derrida wants to generalize this parasitism to meaningful utterances in general. ↑
 35. Notice that the French for retied thread is *fil renoué* where the verb *renouer* captures more clearly the sense of being renewed, revived, brought back to life, so to speak re-animated by the trace of the Other in the work. Derrida, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, 2. ↑

